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ABSTRACT

The manual discusses the Wisconsin boarding home program for handicapped children who live too far from special programs to commute daily. During the school week, the child lives with boarding home parents, who are paid by the Division for Handicapped Children's Services through the local school board. Explained are the child's needs (physical and emotional), and what to do in emergency situations. The relationships between the natural and boarding home parents, and between the latter and the county social services agency, are briefly discussed. (KW)

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A Boarding Home Program for Handicapped Children

A Manual

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A BOARDING HOME PROGRAM FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

A Manual

Issued by

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and

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Special Appreciation to
VIRGINIA STEPHENSON
Child Welfare Consultant,
Division for Handicapped
Children's Services.
She has worked with and for
Wisconsin's handicapped children
for more than 30 years,
during which time she developed the
Boarding Home Program.

Love for children is expressed in many ways.

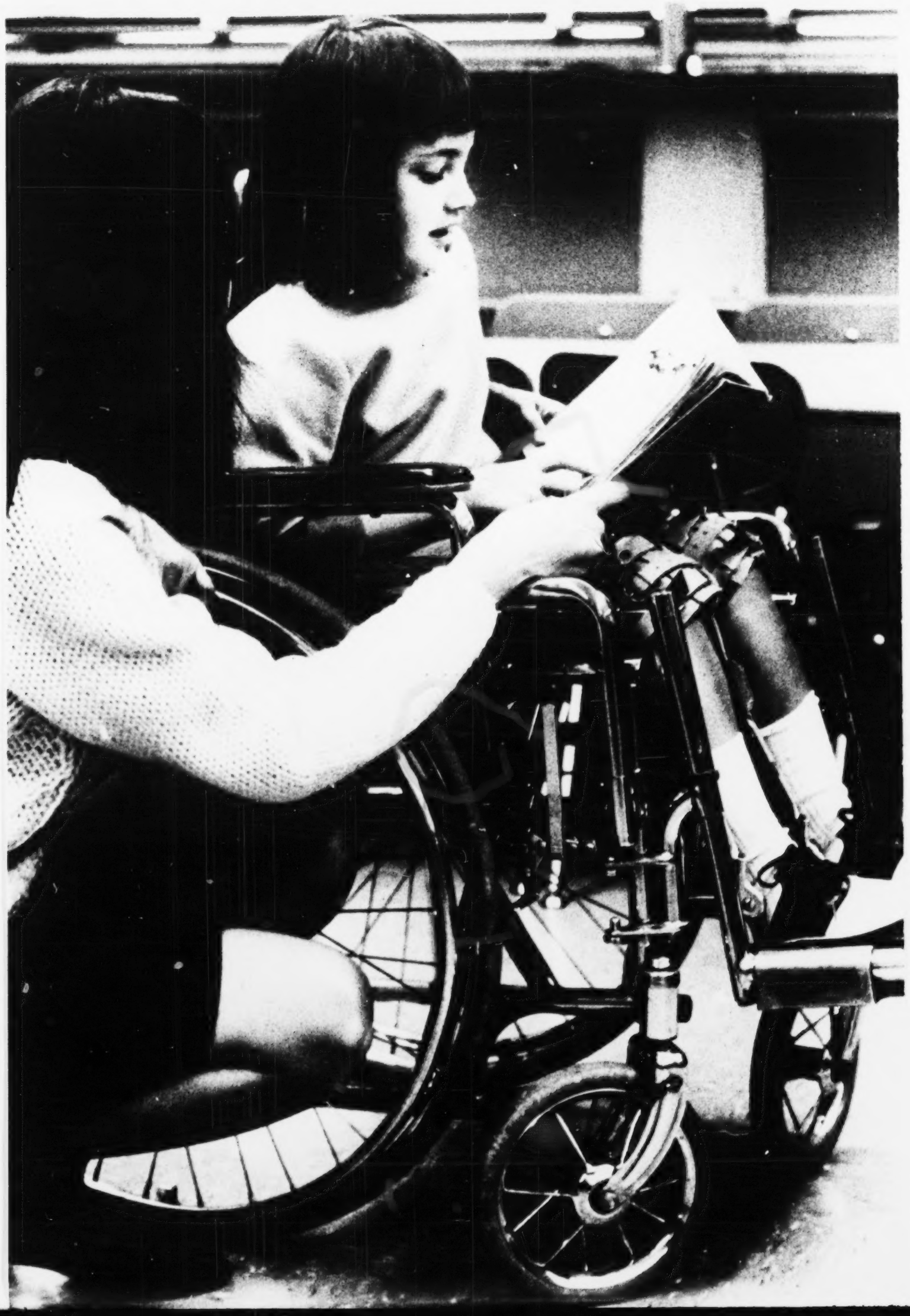
Love is sending your child to live with others so he may learn the skills necessary to permit him to enjoy his total potential.

Love is caring for the child of others and giving him the special care he **may** need and the added attention he **will** need.

The Division for Handicapped Children's Services has great respect for the parents who are so dedicated to their child; the Division is extremely grateful that there are people who will volunteer to be Boarding Home Parents.

Both sets of parents, real and temporary, achieve for themselves an added measure of immortality through their devotion.

There is magic in all children. Some just need a little help to make theirs shine brighter.



Why Boarding Homes Are Needed

There are several thousand children in Wisconsin with a variety of handicaps that can be lessened through special educational programs. Such programs not only aid them in living with their handicaps but help them achieve their maximum potential. However, these special educational programs, with the resources considered vital to the continuing education and treatment these children may need, are not available in all communities. The agency that has been given the responsibility for administering this educational program is the Division for Handicapped Children's Services of the State Department of Public Instruction.

With too many children living too far from the special educational resources to commute, a boarding home program has been developed in lieu of daily transportation. This program has proved to be so successful and valuable that more boarding homes are always needed. Since a major hurdle for anyone with a handicap is his "differentness," anything additional that sets him apart from other children his same age tends to hamper the value of special education. These children need to attend school in as normal a setting as possible. They need to have normal family-type surroundings, which the boarding home program provides.

Under the boarding home arrangement the child is in his own home on weekends, returning to the boarding home sometime Sunday or Monday. He lives with the family all week, ideally coming to feel like a member of the boarding home family. He attends school, does homework, performs such chores as he is able around the house, and lives as normal a life as possible. The boarding home parents see that he does what would be required of their own children, so far as he is able. They assume many aspects of the parent-role, such as supervising homework, attending teacher conferences, participating in extra-curricular activities, etc. The big difference that occurs in otherwise everyday living is that they also assume the responsibilities that go with his educational needs. Further, they are not actually the child's parents, and must live within that limitation.

Finances

For this extraordinary care and devotion the boarding home parents are paid a pre-determined amount per month during the school year. A desig-

nated child-placing agency—usually the local county department of social services—determines the amount the boarding home parents will receive according to the needs of the individual child. Naturally, the more severe the handicap, the more service is required of the boarding home parents, and the greater the compensation they receive. Generally, basic rates of compensation should take into consideration the rates of compensation for foster care programs in the area. These funds are obtained from the local school board which, in turn, is reimbursed through the Division for Handicapped Children's Services which may, and usually does, delegate responsibility for direct supervision of specific children to local county departments of social services.

This monthly payment is made to the boarding home parents on the basis of a five-day week. Even if the child is not in his boarding home part of a week, i. e., Thanksgiving and teachers' meetings, payment is still made for a five-day week. However, this does not apply to regular vacation periods (Christmas, Spring and Summer). Should the child become ill, payment is made for the entire week, any part of which the child has been in the boarding home.

If, for some reason (distance, weather, etc.), the child's parents are unable to come for him on a weekend or if the child is too ill to be taken home, they are to reimburse the boarding home parents themselves. In the event their financial situation makes it impossible to pay all or part of the cost, the Division for Handicapped Children's Services may authorize the local school board to make these payments. While the children stay with their boarding home parents only during the school year, their need of this service may continue for several years, or as long as their need for special education or treatment exists.

According to state statute, the Administrator of the Division for Handicapped Children's Services is "responsible for the services established . . . for children who are crippled, blind, partially seeing, deaf, hard of hearing . . . cardiopathic . . . otherwise physically handicapped or who are mentally handicapped." Many of the handicapped become remarkably self-sufficient and delight in their ability. But for others the road is a much longer one. For them the boarding home parents at the site of an educational resource are vital to their futures.

The Division for Handicapped Children's Services, being a part of the State Department of Public Instruction, generally concerns itself only with the school-age child. The rules of the school board located in the boarding home area are the final authority.

The Child's Needs

Emotional

Many areas in their new life together with a strange child may cause concern on the part of boarding home parents. But the one that usually causes the greatest immediate anxiety is the child's emotional problems, including separation and loneliness.

While the maturity of the child makes a difference in the degree of loneliness he feels, no amount of preparation can make him fully aware of what to expect if he has never been away from home before. However, his parents can do a great deal to help him adjust. Why he must go away to school should be carefully explained. It helps to involve him in the preparations (writing and reading get-acquainted letters, buying clothes, packing suitcases). So does arranging short visits with relatives or friends so he becomes accustomed to the idea of being away from home. By all means, the child should be taught to care for himself as much as possible: dressing, eating, toilet needs, personal habits, etc.

Boarding home parents also must plan with care. In order to take on the responsibility of another's child they have already met the requirements all foster parents must meet, such as being in good health, having sufficient space, experience with children, and so on. They must be prepared to respect the child and his own family. They must be prepared to give him a sense of belonging in their own family. But they must also be able and prepared to help the child learn to stand up to the stresses he will meet in the outside world, stresses that grow out of the limiting factors of his handicap. The county social worker will be able to help with many of these problems. The special school can help with others. Boarding home parents are urged not to be shy about requesting advice or outright aid from either source, particularly during the early days of the placement of the child in the home.

Some problems can be eliminated by careful advance planning. For example, before the child arrives, the boarding home parents should explain to other members of the family why the child is coming and that he will soon become a part of their family. Another example is the handling of special functions such as birthday parties. If the date falls on a weekday it shall be celebrated in some fashion even if the occasion will be repeated at the child's home on the weekend. Routines should be arranged to keep him busy, especially between the time he returns from school and the evening meal. *Listen* to him.

Medical

All applications for children who wish to enter the boarding home program must include a detailed medical history and a current physical examination. In addition, the child's parents are requested to sign a form permitting emergency surgery if, in the opinion of the attending physician, this becomes necessary and the parents cannot be reached immediately. Should the child become ill or injured, the physician, the child's parents, and the county social services agency should be contacted as soon as possible. (See Emergencies, page 11.) Routine medical and dental needs are usually handled during the child's visits to his home.

Diets

When a special diet is prescribed for a child by a physician this information will be shared with the boarding home parents and with the school the child will be attending. Payment for special food costs for meals eaten at the boarding home will be included in the boarding home payment. Some children may have eating problems when they move into a boarding home. Often this works itself out, although boarding home mothers are urged to watch for any unusual eating patterns. Some children included in the program, particularly orthopedic children, are inclined to be overweight.

Exercise

School officials will be alerted to special exercise limitations of the child and will take them into account when planning school activities for him. If special equipment is needed in the boarding home it will be provided by the Division.

Recreation

While some playtime activities enjoyed by normal children may have to be denied the child in boarding home care, he can and should take part in the family's routine and special activities. Picnics and other excursions are as necessary for expanding the horizons of the boarding child as they are for the family's own children. The only problem is the need to be sure he doesn't become too tired from the excitement.

Dating for older students is to be encouraged insofar as they are able and have the approval of their parents and the boarding home parents.

Children should not be discouraged from participating in outside group activities, such as sports, glee club, Hi-Y, Scouts or other activities typical of their age group. In the event a handicap prevents a child from active partici-

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pation, he can enjoy participating as a spectator. For older children to engage in body contact sports (football, basketball, wrestling, etc.) their natural parents' written approval is required.

School

When any child transfers to another school there may be some anxiety on his part. When a child with a handicap is transferred to another school and is to live with strangers in addition, there may be considerable apprehension. In the very young child this is likely to result in poor marks, lack of interest, dislike of going to school. The boarding home parents will be required to use good judgment until the child settles into his new surroundings.

Transportation

The child's parents are responsible for arranging and paying for his transportation home on weekends. If necessary, personal agreement can usually be reached between the child's parents and the boarding home parents to get the child to the nearest source of public transportation and to pick him up there on his return.

In some instances it is necessary for a child to be transported to and from school by taxi or privately owned commercial transportation. Where use of taxis is necessary, special arrangements will be completed *before* the child will enter school.

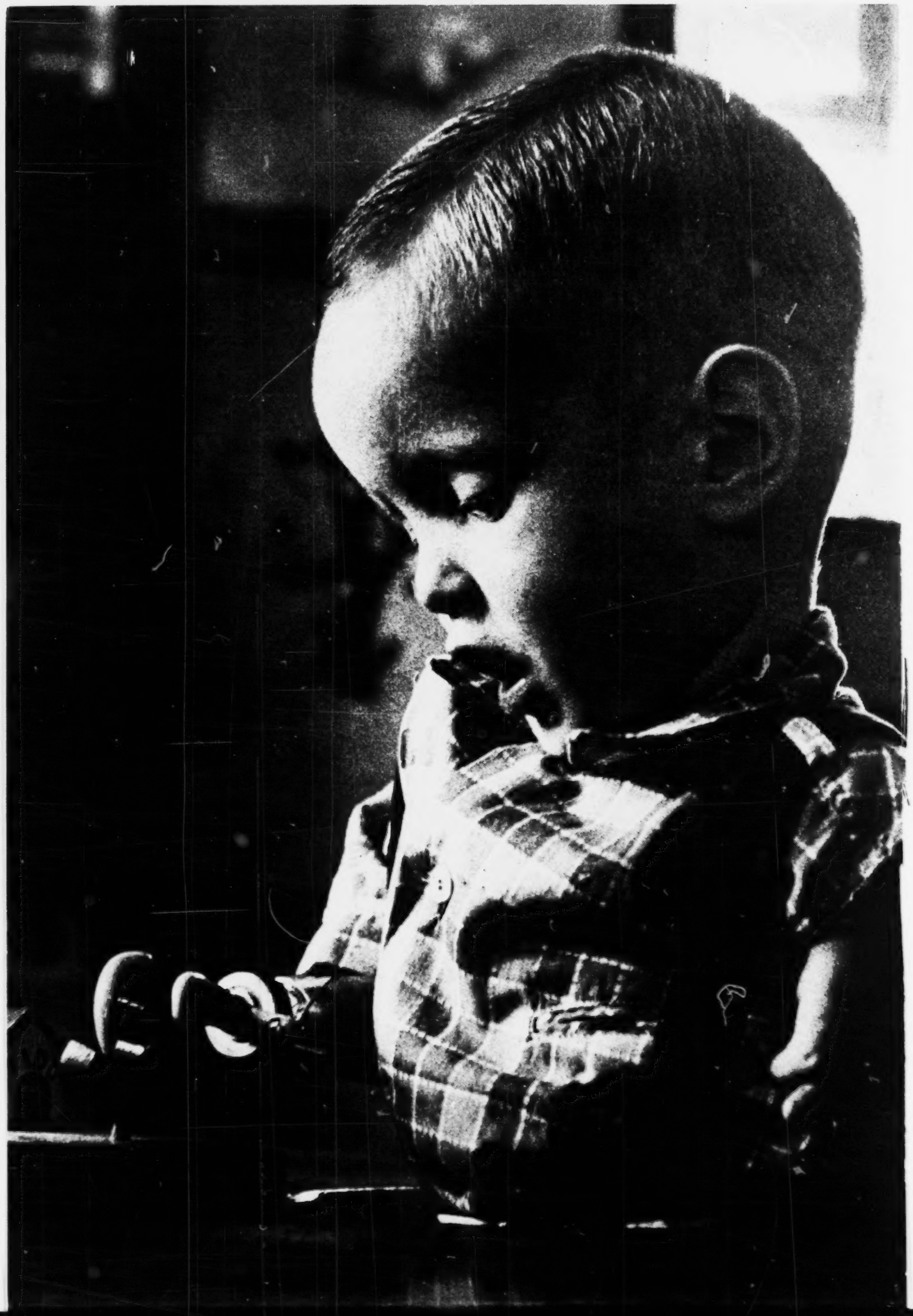
Most children will be going to school by school bus if they live more than a prescribed distance from the school. Arrangements for them to be picked up by the school bus must be made before the child is to begin school in order to handle routing problems. Young children and those who have never traveled by bus before may benefit from an explanation of what it is like and what they can and cannot do on the bus.

If it becomes necessary for the child to ride city buses it is wise to travel with him the first few days and be on hand to pick him up and return home with him. Handling of passes or change, recognizing the proper landmarks so he will get off at the right time and the like are difficult to keep straight when you are very young and in a strange city traveling on a bus for the first time.

It is recommended that the child be permitted—or encouraged—to go to and from school on his own, for him to develop a feeling of independence.

Religion

Whenever possible, children are usually placed with families of the same



religion as their own parents. In those instances where this is not possible, with the approval of the natural parents, the boarding home parents are expected to sustain the child's religious training in his own faith. While he is seldom in the boarding home on weekends and attendance at religious services is thus the responsibility of his parents, observance of special religious holidays during the week, and the like, are to be followed as though he were in his own home.

Discipline

Discipline is important in every child's life. Without it there would be very little self-control. It is important to remember, however, that disciplining a child must be done with kindness, firmness, understanding and for a purpose which is absolutely clear to the child and to the boarding home parents. The type of discipline most appropriate and effective for the particular child must be discussed with the child's natural parents and the social worker.

Special Problems and Emergencies

While all boarding home parents are experienced in handling the many "special" problems and situations that are part of caring for children, there are times when even the most enthusiastic boarding parent feels the need for some help or, at least, someone else's insights. These can range from a child's wetting the bed to outright belligerence. With the children of this program there are also the additional complications of the child's handicap, which may create problems totally out of the boarding home parents' experience.

The county social services agency that licensed the boarding home can provide much help. Its social workers, like other professional counsellors, are exposed to great numbers of other people's problems every day and can usually provide either the answer or some other sources of assistance. School problems should be discussed with school personnel.

Emergencies

Should an acute emergency arise—if, for example, the child is injured in an accident—and the child's parents or the county's social worker cannot be contacted, boarding home parents are to get in touch with their doctor (or the child's doctor, if he has a specialist), tell him of the child's special status, and let him decide if the nature of the emergency is so serious that he should proceed immediately. In the meantime, of course, continuous effort must be made to contact the child's parents and the county social services agency.

Oklahoma
Indian City

Boarding Home Parents and Natural Parents

While it is not absolutely essential to the success of the boarding home program for the individual child, cordial relationships between boarding home parents and the child's natural parents will make the child's life much happier and will do much to help him make the most of his special schooling.

Natural parents have to feel that the boarding home parents will be concerned about the child's welfare instead of considering him merely a source of income. They have to feel that the boarding home parents will help the child with his daily problems and that they will stimulate the child's desire to learn.

On the other hand, boarding home parents are usually somewhat apprehensive, too, at the prospect of actually taking on the responsibility to care for someone else's child. For this reason visits to the boarding home by the natural parents and the child are encouraged. If parents come in person to pick up and deliver their child on weekends, this extra opportunity to get to know the boarding home parents will produce dividends for the child. Occasionally, both sets of parents will make an extra effort to get together for special outings, such as picnics or group social activities like church dinners, although this, of course, is not required.

When personal contact between natural and boarding home parents is difficult or impossible the distance can be bridged other ways. The practice of sending notes regarding progress or special activities back and forth with the child helps establish and maintain a feeling of balance and continuity between the child's two families. Part of this balance is the establishment in the boarding home parents' minds that there *is* another family, the natural family, and this makes it easier to accept the fact the natural parents have the right to make the important decisions affecting the child. It is vital for boarding home and natural parents to work together. Where there is a breakdown of the relationship between both sets of parents or where even the hint of opposing goals for the child appears, the child soon senses this and often takes advantage of it, playing one set of adults against the other.

Boarding Home Parents and the Social Services Agency

The county social services department, which licenses the boarding home according to the state regulations for foster homes, will make periodic visits

to the boarding home and, sometimes, to the school. The social worker may request a chat with the child alone. The intent in any of these conversations is not to dig up gossip or to pry into the child's relationship with the boarding home parent (although it is possible for this to be brought up), but to give the worker a chance to talk with the child on a strictly person-to-person basis. The worker talks to school personnel because they have a special vantage point from which they view the child (how he acts in class, how he gets along with the other children, how his training is progressing).

Basically, the social worker is a specially trained person with particular responsibilities who completes the team that is working for the child and his future, a team composed of the child's natural parents, his boarding home parents, the school and all its personnel, and the social worker. By working together, all can do a better job of helping the child to make the maximum use of his entire potential.

Other Boarding Home Parents

In many areas of the state, associations or clubs for foster (boarding home) parents have been formed. If there is one in your area the experiences of its membership may be very rewarding or helpful. The local county department of social services can verify the presence of such an association, if there is one, and will be happy to provide names and addresses of people who can be contacted. If there is no foster parents' association the names of other boarding home parents may be obtained from the social worker.

In the past special courses have been given for boarding home parents. They were prepared and produced under the guidance of the Extension Division of the University of Wisconsin when contracted for by social service agencies. These courses provide a broad theoretical knowledge of children and their psychology, as well as practical information that could greatly assist people caring for children with special problems. Any boarding home parents who hear of such a course and wish to attend it should contact the child welfare consultant of the Division for Handicapped Children's Services in Madison. The Division may pay the necessary tuition and, in some cases, include the cost of travel.